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AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ARCHÆOLOGY.

Vol. VI.

DECEMBER, 1890.

No. 4.

A VASE OF THE MYKENAI TYPE IN NEW YORK.

[PLATE XXII.]

In the course of a recent visit to America, I was shown with much kindness the Abbott collection of antiquities from Egypt now in the Museum of the Historical Society of New York. Needless to say, the inspection of the Museum was full of interest. But in passing round the cases there was one object that suddenly attracted my attention. It was a painted vase, here reproduced. It stood beside other vases of purely Egyptian fabric, and on turning to the catalogue we saw that it had been found in Lower Egypt. Yet it was clearly different from true Egyptian ware. To me it was from the first an unmistakable example of the pottery which of late years has been found at Mykenai, at Ialysos in Rhodes, at Spata, Menidi, and on many other sites of Greece proper. At the same time, it was far more naturalistic than any vase of the kind that had been hitherto observed and recorded. Even the shape was a little startling, so entirely novel was it. I concluded that it was a very late specimen of the Mykenai ware.

There was not, in fact, anything strange in a vase of this class coming from Egypt, because I had long been familiar with pottery of the ordinary Mykenai type found in that country. The British Museum has a number of specimens. Meantime I remembered a letter from a correspondent in Egypt who had purchased a remarkable vase which had been found at Erment on the Nile, about ten miles above Luxor. On returning to London I found that this vase had arrived at the British Museum and was an absolute counterpart of the one in New York, except in the matter of shape which in this second example was a shape

familiar to the Mykenai pottery. Otherwise it may be safely said that both vases had been painted by the same man, if not even on the same day, so completely identical is the style of painting in both. Add to this that the subject represented is the same in character, the principal decoration being a large figure of a nautilus repeated round the body of the vase in the position of sailing along in the sea with three large feelers (*plektanai*) rising from the shell and turning in a naturally decorative manner. The suckers along the edge of the *plektanai* are very plainly indicated. The bottom of the sea is represented by rocks with sea-weeds growing from them, and, what is curious in the painter's endeavor to give us a view of the bottom of the sea is that, when he had put in his rocks rising from what is naturally the bottom line of the picture, he then turned the vase upside down and started with a new bottom line, having again rocks and weeds rising from it. At first sight these latter appear to be hanging from the sky ; but, in fact, it is a contrivance to give us a sort of bird's-eye-view down into the sea. It may here be noticed in passing that the gold cups of Vaphio exhibit in the same way a rocky ground along both the top and bottom of the design, as does also the stone pyxis from Mykenai¹ with the relief of two fine cuttlefish sculptured in low relief.

The sea-weeds and the nautilus are drawn with such apparent realism that I had no thought but that they would be instantly recognized and identified by naturalists. This hope, however, proved delusive. While certain features are admittedly rendered with great force and truthfulness, yet, on the whole, the nautilus on these vases is not nearly an accurate drawing of the nautilus known to modern naturalists. Nor, in fact, does it answer to the descriptions of ancient naturalists except in its general aspect. Details, which are all important to a naturalist, were often in the way of a painter whose design must first of all be decorative. Aristotle² (*De Animal. Hist.*, IX. 37. 12) mentions as a characteristic of the nautilus that its *plectanæ* were connected by a very thin membrane like a spider's web (*ἀραχνιώδες*), which it employed as a sail when there was a breeze. There is no trace of this on the two vases ; yet there is to be seen on a very striking, but not yet pub-

¹ *Ephemeris arch.*, 1888, pl. 7, fig. 1.

² Quoted by ATHENAIOS, VII. 105 ; see also AELIAN, IX. 34, and PLINY, *Nat. Hist.*, IX. 88. ARISTOTLE (*De Animal. Hist.*, IV. 1. 16) says that the *nautilus* was called also *ποντίλος*, which PLINY (*loc. cit.*) appears to confuse with the *pompilos*, the sacred fish of the Greeks.

lished, vase of the Mykenai type from Kalymna in the British Museum exactly such a membrane connecting the feelers of an octopus—a true octopus with eight *plectanae*, four of which have suckers. It would seem as if the vase-painters of the Mykenai period had observed the natural features of the polypi carefully enough, but had distributed them wilfully amongst different species.

Ever since the pottery of the Mykenai class came into notice the remark has been made that it must have been the production of a people living on the coast of the Mediterranean and devoted to marine pursuits, so regularly are the designs on it drawn from aquatic, if not always strictly marine life. The cuttlefish, the murex, seaweeds and aquatic plants were the favorite subjects, and when by chance the painter essayed to sketch a quadruped the effect was ludicrously inadequate. See, for instance, the quadruped on a large vase found at Kalymna now in the British Museum. The inference was that the makers of this pottery could have had only a very secondary interest in the creatures and growths of the land. But this could hardly apply to the Greeks, who, though they had an extensive seaboard, are not known to have cultivated the coast at the expense of the inland. It seemed as if the pottery could not have been the work of Greeks in the mainland of Greece, while, on the other hand, the presence of the murex as a frequent design seemed to point to the Phœnicians, with whom it was an industry to fish for the murex and to extract a dye from it. This industry they carried on actively on the coast of Greece. They lived on the coast of the Mediterranean. Of all manners of life they preferred that of the sea. Cyprus was one of their principal settlements and Cyprus has yielded a number of vases of the class in question, the chief of which are to be seen in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, including one on the handles of which are incised Cypriote letters. Nevertheless it was to have been expected, on the theory of a Phœnician origin for these vases, that Cyprus would before now have yielded an abundance of them. It is certainly significant that this has not been the case. So also is the general absence of inscriptions, when we consider how fond the Phœnicians were of putting this or that on record in writing.

Apart from the pottery, if that is necessary, the Phœnician theory would account satisfactorily for many of the other antiquities found with the pottery in Greece. It would explain the numerous objects cast in glass-paste in the form of rosettes and occasionally of creatures

such as the Sphinx and the nautilus, the bottles of variegated glass, the carvings in ivory, the inlaid daggers of Mykenai, the skilfully-made weapons of bronze, the engraved gems, and the occasional scarabs with Egyptian hieroglyphs. In short, the opening incident in the pages of Herodotos when a Phœnician ship comes to Argos to barter its wares seems to be illustrated by the finds of Mykenai, Nauplia, *etc.*

But it does not follow, because the Phœnicians had in early ages something like a supremacy of trade on the Mediterranean, that they were the exclusive traders of the time. It would be more natural to suppose that their success had been won over rivals. We read of Minos, the legendary Cretan ruler, with his thalassocracy, and we think chiefly of war, not of commerce—yet the power of Minos would have been of little moment unless to protect commerce. To this day the island of Kreta remains unexplored: but the number of gems of the Mykenai class which have been picked up on it from time to time may indicate what is in store when a systematic exploration takes place. Not that we suppose Kreta to have stood by itself as a rival of the Phœnicians. Kreta would have been joined in trade with Rhodes, Kalymna, Kos, to mention only those sites where antiquities of the kind in question have been conspicuously found. And whatever was produced in those districts would equally have been produced on the neighboring coast of Asia Minor, as we see from the results of excavations at Assarlik in Karia. Close as they were to the seats of the Phœnicians, those districts would indeed have been barbarous had they not learned some of the arts by which the Phœnicians were so obviously enriching themselves. As a matter of fact, the Greek or semi-Greek populations of Asia Minor and of the islands more or less close to Asia Minor were early noted for their skill in the arts. As time went on, it was among them that the higher arts rose first into fame.

It would seem, then, that in searching for the origin of the antiquities of the Mykenai class we ought to keep in view a combination of Phœnician and Græco-Asiatic influences. The Greeks of Asia Minor—those Carians and Ionians, who, in historical times, served as mercenaries in Egypt and ended by placing Psameticos I on the throne of Egypt, about the middle of the VII cent. B. C.—were likely enough to have been acquainted with that country sometime before then. They were as likely as the Phœnicians to have carried up the Nile the vase of the Abbott collection and those others kindred to it of which we have spoken. They would bring something back in exchange,

whether it was in the form of scarabs with hieroglyphs, glass bottles, or whatever else. We may well doubt, however, whether they had ever cared to learn those more complicated arts in which the Phœnicians excelled, such as the production of artistic designs in glass or the inlaying of metals. It is far more probable that, whenever objects of this nature are found along with the Mykenai antiquities in Greece, they are the work of Phœnicians; while as to the pottery, the engraved gems and the designs in gold, these may perhaps fairly be put down to the account of the early Greek contemporaries and rivals of the Phœnicians. As regards the engraved gems, it is not necessary to point out here that several Greek legends are found represented on them, *e. g.*, Herakles wrestling with Nereus, and Prometheus bound. The former of these gems recalls the frieze of Assos, the latter a vase of what is termed the Kyrene style. If the frieze of Assos with its remarkable combination of animals and human forms reminds us of the painted vases of the latter half of the VII cent. B. C., the gem of Herakles could hardly be thought older than the first half of that century. In any case, both gems take us fairly into the tide of Greek legend as illustrated in art, a tide which we see in full flood on the chest of Kypselos in the VII cent. The date may be wrong, but this much is clear, that those gems were the work of Greek engravers. We can understand them as the work of the men who immediately preceded Mnesarchos, the engraver of Samos, better known as the father of the philosopher Pythagoras.

In the present state of the question, it is not so necessary to enquire about the beginning of the art of the Mykenai kind as to determine when it ended and what are the points of contact between it and the Greek pottery of an ascertained date. Some years ago I had occasion to discuss this matter in the *Revue Archéologique* (XLIV (1882) p. 342), laying particular stress on the occurrence of the rosette as a pattern on vases of the Mykenai class, and arguing that the rosette, though comparatively rare on the vases, is very frequent among the ornaments of glass-paste found with the vases, and that any day it might have become common on the vases also. The rosettes which appear on the vases are of two kinds—the one perfectly formed with regular leaves, as it is found on vases from Kameiros and elsewhere, the other composed of a disc with dots round it, exactly such as we find so often on what are called the Protocorinthian vases. From a technical point of view the fabric of the Mykenai vases is very frequently identical with VII-cent.

vases from Kameiros in Rhodes. The slip with which the vase is covered, the method of painting the pattern on the slip, and the colors employed, are the same. The great and striking difference is in the shapes and subjects of design. Or again, if we compare the way in which the bull of Tiryns is painted, with the formal patches of dark color along his back and belly, with the bulls on the terracotta sarcophagi from Kameiros in the British Museum and from Klazomenai in Berlin, we shall find exactly the same procedure.³ Of course there is more skill on the sarcophagi, and no doubt the Tiryns bull is older in art. The difficulty is to determine the amount of the interval.

Mr. Flinders Petrie has obtained, in his recent excavations in the Fayoum, a certain number of vases of the Mykenai class. He has found them under conditions and amid surroundings which he considers justify him in saying that the latest possible date for them is the XII cent. B. C. Some of them he believes belong to a vastly earlier age. But, as I have said, we have first to settle the latest date of this pottery in Greece and its continuity with the Greek pottery of an ascertained date. Then we may work backward.

To return to the New-York vase with its figures of the nautilus and its sea-weeds. On some fragments of fresco-painting found at Mykenai⁴ we observe an ornamental border composed of figures of the nautilus, converted into a mere pattern with no suggestion of realism or truth to nature. The curling tentacles form just such a pattern as the free hand of the decorator desired. And the question arises, whether we have here a convenient pattern generalized from familiar realistic studies of the nautilus on vases or elsewhere. Such a view is, for my part, contrary to the regular process of invention in art. No one could paint the nautilus as it is painted on the New-York vase unless he had been preceded by a time of study, experiment in drawing, and the invention of materials for painting. The nautilus as a mere pattern at Mykenai appears to me to belong to that age of experimenting where the sweeping lines of a brush into color threw out at almost every turn suggestions of natural forms which the eye was quick to see and improve upon. If this view be correct, we must regard the New-York vase as one of the latest developments of the Mykenai period. As an example of strong, vigorous naturalism, it

³ The Berlin sarcophagus is published in the *Antike Denkmäler*, 1889, p. 44.

⁴ *Ephemeris arch.*, 1887, pl. 12.

may be compared with the gold cups⁵ found last year at Vaphio near Sparta, with their powerful representations of bull-hunting. In one of the scenes, where a huge bull has been caught by a net and is floundering within it, we are reminded that to a people trained to life on the sea-coast the use of a net for hunting would come natural enough, though it strikes us that the net would have to be very strong to withstand the rush of so fierce a bull. For smaller animals the net was of course in regular use in the chase. The net is stretched between two olive-trees to which it is made fast: in the field also are palm-trees. But it does not seem that anything in the nature of a historical date can be obtained from the presence of these trees. So far as they or the bulls are concerned, the gold cups may have been made in Asia Minor or in Greece itself. One of the bulls which has escaped the net tosses, one after the other, the two huntsmen. These huntsmen have long flowing hair, and so far they may have been Greeks. Their costume consists of a girdle round the waist and pointed boots. Altogether they give me more the impression of a Celtic than of an Oriental race. In fact, the whole scene—as presented on the two cups—becomes suggestive of a Celtic people when we apply to it the famous Greek legend of cattle-driving, that of Herakles and the cattle of Geryon. M. Tsountas⁶ very finely compares the two passages in the *Iliad* (XIII. 570, *ad.* XV. 403) where the binding and leading of a reluctant bull are described, and this shows how apt an illustration the gold cups furnish of Homer. It is true that the same scenes had been passing before the eyes of artists and poets long before Homer, and continued so to pass long after his day. But, as regards Greece proper, we may perhaps confidently say, that it was only in or about the time of Homer that these scenes came directly under the observation of artists and were reproduced by them as actual transcripts from nature. Among the Celtic peoples the case would be quite different. The scenes of bull-hunting would be much later in coming within their artistic horizon. But, be this as it may, the point I desire to call attention to in this matter of bull-hunting is the comparison that is presented between the very simple binding of the bull by one hind leg on the gold cup and the complicated binding of the Marathonion bull by Theseus, as seen on the painted Greek vases, *e. g.*, the fragmentary kylix published in the *Journal of Hellenic*

⁵ *Ephemeris arch.*, 1889, pl. 9.

⁶ *Ephemeris arch.*, 1889, p. 162.

Studies (x, pl. 2), which should be compared with a red-figured kylix in the British Museum. The Museum kylix has been well preserved, and shows very clearly that Theseus has taken the precaution of binding the bull, not only by its four feet, but also by the scrotum. On the fragmentary vase just mentioned, we have an earlier stage of the incident. The bull is still unbound. It appears to have knocked Theseus over on his back, or, what is more likely, Theseus has adroitly slipped to the ground, turned round on his back and seized the scrotum of the bull, having a cord ready in his other hand. This, of course, is not the explanation given in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* (x, p. 238).

It will thus be seen that the New-York vase leads on into a wide field of enquiry, and, if I have only been able to pursue it to a limited degree, yet there is consolation in the fact that hardly anywhere, outside of Greece, can this branch of archæology be better studied than in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, with its incomparable series of works of this class discovered in Cyprus by General Cesnola.

A. S. MURRAY.

British Museum.



VASE OF THE MYKENAI TYPE IN THE ABBOTT COLLECTION. NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY.